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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 001401

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/PMBS, DRL, DRL/CRA, INR/EAP
NSC FOR GREEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: LEFTISTS CLAIM SYSTEMATIC CAMPAIGN TO KILL PARTY MEMBERS

REF: A. MANILA 1151

- [1](#)B. MANILA 1127
- [1](#)C. MANILA 0887
- [1](#)D. MANILA 0387
- [1](#)E. 04 MANILA 5901
- [1](#)F. 04 MANILA 5552

Classified By: Political Officer Timothy L. Cipullo
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Gunmen have already killed up to eighteen members of leftist front groups including Bayan Muna -- a political party closely associated with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) -- since the beginning of 2005. Leftist leaders have claimed that there is a "systematic campaign" underway by GRP security forces to kill leftist party members. The GRP has promised that it is investigating the killings and police claim to have "identified" one suspect so far. The NPA continues its long-standing insurgency, frequently assassinating local leaders as well as ambushing GRP security forces. We have raised concerns with the GRP about the situation, but the culture of violence will continue to thrive for the foreseeable future. End Summary.

Spree of killings

[1](#)2. (U) Gunmen have already in 2005 killed up to eighteen activists belonging to left-leaning organizations, while seriously wounding several others. Two other individuals are missing. These killings have occurred primarily in central and northern Luzon and in the Visayan region. Details of major incidents follow:

-- on March 22, unidentified gunmen in Pampanga Province (northwest of Manila) attacked lawyer Charles Juloya, a losing Bayan Muna candidate in the 2004 Congressional elections. Juloya remains in critical condition, having suffered six gunshot wounds. He was the second target of violence among fourteen suspects in a 1999 killing of former rebel priest and ex-NPA member Conrado Balweg (although the NPA itself claimed responsibility for his death), following the March 9 slaying of Romeo Sanchez (see below);

-- on March 16, two gunmen in Camarines Norte Province in Southern Luzon shot and killed Joel Reyes, an organizer for the CPP/NPA-linked peasant group, Anakpawis;

-- on March 14 in Tacloban City, Leyte Province, two men riding a motorcycle shot and killed Felidito Dacut, the Bayan Muna regional coordinator for the Eastern Visayas region;

-- on March 10, four unidentified men shot and killed Ernesto Bang on the doorstep of his house in Camarines Norte. Bang was the public information officer of the Camarines Norte chapter of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Farmers' Movement of the Philippines), another peasant organization);

-- on March 9 in the crowded Baguio City public market, a lone gunman killed Romeo Sanchez, Bayan Muna coordinator for the Ilocos Region. Sanchez, a suspect in the 1999 Balweg murder, was also a radio journalist (ref A);

-- on March 3, a gunman shot and killed Abelardo Ladera, Councilor of Tarlac City and Provincial Chapter Leader of Bayan Muna. Ladera was a supporter of various left-leaning causes in Tarlac Province, including the effort to support striking farm workers at Hacienda Luisita, where in November 2004 security forces killed at least seven people when they fired into a crowd of protesters at the estate -- (refs B,D,E).

Left Accuses Security Forces

[1](#)3. (SBU) Leftist front groups have publicly accused GRP security forces of waging a "systematic campaign" to eliminate leftist operatives. According to Bayan Muna

spokesman and Congressman Satur Ocampo, "the probability, if not certainty, that these (killings) are perpetrated by agents of the state, through its military or paramilitary operatives, makes the situation a larger cause for public concern." Ocampo claimed that almost fifty leftist activists have been killed since 2001. Ocampo, along with fellow Bayan Muna Congressman Teddy Casino, have drafted a resolution urging Congress to condemn the attacks; Congress is expected to consider the resolution in April. Casino told poloff that he and other Bayan Muna members "fear for their lives" due to the recent violence but did not provide any hard evidence or documentation to back up allegations of GRP involvement in the attacks.

14. (C) Gilberto Teodoro, a Congressman from Tarlac, separately told poloff that he was concerned that elements linked with the AFP may be involved in the killings. However, Teodoro (part of the large Cojuangco clan that owns Hacienda Luisita) did not provide any hard evidence. He expressed worry that there could be a "real bloodbath" if the NPA decided to retaliate for the killings of the leftist activists.

GRP Reaction

15. (SBU) The Philippine National Police (PNP) has promised that it is actively investigating the killings. So far, however, authorities have made progress on only one of the cases. A special task force created by the Cordillera police department (in the Ilocos region) has "identified" a suspect in connection with the March 9 killing of Bayan Muna official, Romeo Sanchez. According to the PNP, Baguio City police are now "preparing the necessary evidence and other pertinent documents to facilitate the filing of murder charges" against a known suspect described by eyewitnesses. The Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the constitutionally-mandated body set up to promote human rights in the Philippines, has also tasked its own investigators to look into the recent killings. According to CHR officials, however, the CHR has not received any formal complaints about any of the killings as of yet. Bayan Muna representatives nonetheless claimed to poloff that they planned to file a detailed complaint shortly covering all of the killings so far this year. (Note: CHR can investigate human rights matters without a complaint, but the filing of a complaint sets off mandated timeframes by which a formal report must be filed. End Note.)

NPA Violence

16. (U) The NPA itself has a long history of attacks on members of the military and police during its almost forty-year insurgency. In its print and electronic publication "Ang Bayan," the CPP/NPA boasted that the NPA had killed 138 members of the PNP and AFP in 2004 alone. (The PNP has reported that the NPA assassinated only 91 PNP and AFP members in 2004, however.) Some recent NPA attacks on security forces include:

-- In early 2005, after the slaying of two policemen (witnessed by an amcit) by suspected NPA members at the local airport in Catanduanes Island (in Southern Tagalog), local police sent six officers to pursue the killers, but suspected NPA soldiers ambushed and killed them;

-- On December 14, 2004, suspected NPA members staged a road accident in Tarlac. When police responded, gunmen opened fire, killing the two officers;

-- On November 30, 2004, suspected NPA forces ambushed and killed 10 AFP soldiers deployed on rescue and relief operations in typhoon-ravaged Quezon Province.

GRP Concern About the CPP/NPA

17. (C) Contacts in the GRP have expressed frustration over the NPA attacks and the failure to bring the perpetrators to justice. An internal PNP report in 2004 stated that "...losses incurred by the Government from recent NPA atrocities show that the NPA has become bolder and efficient in the conduct of its armed offensives." Ref b noted new strategic efforts by the GRP to deal with the CPP/NPA, including the appointment of a new GRP panel for peace talks.

18. (C) GRP officials are also alarmed by what they consider to be rapid political gains by parties associated with the CPP/NPA in recent years. The same PNP also stated that "after the 2004 elections, the party (Bayan Muna) is expected to significantly move forward in terms of increasing its mass base support through transforming the electoral mass base

developed and organized by the six (6) party-list groups that it has fielded for the party-list elections. In this regard, the so-called white areas or venue of open mass campaigns would be expected to expand, along with the intensification of protest movements by exploiting national and local issues.

These activities are likely to strongly complement the intensification of NPA armed offensives in the so-called guerrilla fronts or red areas." (Note: Bayan -- the umbrella group of Bayan Muna and other leftist parties -- managed to get six of its members elected to Congress under the "party list" system, established in 2001. This allows political parties representation in Congress if they receive at least two percent of the national vote. Party list candidates do not represent any particular geographical district. End Note.)

Comment

19. (C) Embassy has raised concerns in meetings with GRP officials about the killings of known left-wing activists. Historically, however, few perpetrators of extrajudicial killings have ever been arrested, much less convicted of crimes. Authorities have not even filed any charges related to the recent rash of murders of journalists (ref a) over the past several months despite widespread public concerns and vows of action by the GRP. The culture of violence remains strong in the Philippines, often more linked to local vendettas, personal feuds, and competing business interests than political agendas. However, the NPA insurgency remains bloody and many Filipinos feel frustrated by the inability of the AFP to defeat the NPA or of the GRP to offer attractive peace terms. Sadly, more violence is inevitable.
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